United Nations

Daily Highlights

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WEDNESDAY HIGHLIGHTS

+ As General Assembly concludes general debate, Secretary-General says United Nations cannot operate effectively because of precarious financial situation.

+ General Assembly President says general debate revealed international community's frustration over unkept promises of peace; Guinea-Bissau, Belize, Saint Lucia, Burundi and Grenada make statements today.

+ Comoros says Africa's economic situation constitutes permanent threat to international community; Sweden, Lesotho, Zimbabwe, Dominican Republic, Gambia, Marshall Islands, Niger and Botswana among other speakers in yesterday's general debate.

+ UNHCR cancels 21 relief flights into Sarajevo after two mortar rounds land on airport; two UNPROFOR planes hit by small-arms fire.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali today reiterated his concern at the precarious financial situation of the United Nations. Addressing the General Assembly as it concluded its general debate, he said the Organization had very limited cash reserves and could not operate effectively in the current circumstances. "This is no longer simply a financial question; it is an urgent political question", he stressed.

The Secretary-General said the United Nations had debts exceeding $1.7 billion at the end of August. It owed $1 billion to Member States for peace-keeping contributions, $400 million to vendors and suppliers, and $325 million for previous budget surpluses. The Organization needed $400 million each month to cover its costs, but had only $375 million in cash balances. Meanwhile, it was owed $3.2 billion by Member States.

Many States were late in paying assessed contributions, he continued. At the end of August, only 56 had paid their regular budget assessments in full. A month later, 62 States had made no payment. The process of approving

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peace-keeping budgets and appropriations was another problem. Months passed between the Security Council's approval of an operation and the receipt of contributions for it. Because of late and delayed payments, the United Nations had to delay its own payments to Member States.

Another important element in the Organization's financial structure was the method of assessment, he said. Member States had endorsed three basic concepts: capacity to pay; the special responsibility of permanent Council members for peace-keeping expenses; and the use of objective criteria in realigning contributions. They might wish to review the practical application of those concepts in the apportionment of expenses, and consider whether the present scale of assessments was equitable. Annexed to his statement was a paper entitled, "Ensuring a Viable Financial Basis for the Organization".

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General Assembly President Amara Essy (Côte d'Ivoire) today said the general debate had revealed the international community's frustration over promises not kept -- promises to build a world of peace after the cold war. He cited the increase in regional conflicts and civil wars, against a backdrop of religious and ethnic tensions. He welcomed the support expressed for preventive diplomacy, and the interest shown in the Secretary-General's Agenda for Peace.

Many speakers had focused on economic and social development, and the need for practical measures to implement the Agenda for Development, he noted. Regarding United Nations reform, speakers had focused on increasing the number of permanent and non-permanent members of the Security Council. On the eve of its fiftieth anniversary, the United Nations must adapt to international changes. Member States must enable the Organization to pursue its mission as a unique instrument for international peace, security and development.

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Marcelino Lima, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of Guinea-Bissau, told the General Assembly today that his country was committed to the promotion of an international system based on human values. Africa was currently the region most effected by conflicts, and more than half of the recent United Nations peace-keeping operations had been sent there. He called on the parties to the conflicts in Angola and Somalia to work for lasting peace settlements. He welcomed the progress achieved with regard to Western Sahara and expressed support for the efforts of the Secretary-General.

Guinea-Bissau had recently had democratic elections, and would count on international support for the further development of democracy, he continued. He welcomed the conclusion of the Convention on Desertification, noting that his country was greatly effected by that phenomenon, and the success of the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). The

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breakthrough on trade should benefit developing countries. It was necessary to revise the present unbalanced economic order and to deal with the external indebtedness of those countries.

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Dean Barrow, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Economic Development and Attorney-General of Belize, today said that his country had been the first small State to agree to participate in the multinational force in Haiti. Belize was interested in the establishment of stand-by forces for peace-keeping, and was willing to host a regional training centre for them. He noted that the process of democratization was continuing across the region. In Guatemala, a plebiscite, congressional elections and an agreement between the Government and the Unidad Revolucionaría Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) had strengthened internal order.

Belize was in the process of adjusting to changing economic circumstances and was trying to restore fiscal discipline following the profligate behaviour of the Government between 1989 and 1993, he continued. The Bretton Woods institutions had a duty to respond to the country's special circumstances. Funds must be provided for skills training, human resource development and poverty alleviation, particularly for small democracies undertaking voluntary structural adjustment. He noted that the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) had made progress towards sub-regional integration and cooperation. Belize was ideally situated to assist in bringing together various sub-regions.

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William George Mallet, Saint Lucia's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Trade and Industry, expressed support for the Secretary-General's efforts to promote greater regional involvement in conflict resolution. Saint Lucia was proud to be a participant in the United Nations Mission in Haiti (UNMIH), along with other countries of the Caribbean Community. Cuba's isolation from economic and social development in the region needed to be re-examined. The agreement with the United States on immigration should lead to further dialogue between the two countries.

He called attention to the circumstances of small island States and the need for special measures to cope with them, noting that Saint Lucia was highly dependent on banana exports. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the World Trade Organization offered benefits for some developed countries, but developing countries still feared the retention of certain trade barriers. Moreover, the North American Free Trade Association (NAFTA) had not expressly taken into account the limited industrial bases of small States. The deterioration of their fragile economies would lead to social discontent, he warned.

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Jean-Marie Ngendahayo, Burundi's Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, told the General Assembly today that his country had suffered the

loss of two Presidents in six months. The assassination of President Ndadaye in October 1993 had led to political and ethnic massacres and severely tested the democratic process. President Ntaryamira had died in an aircraft accident last April, which also took the life of the President of Rwanda. The resulting crisis had exacerbated existing problems, but the people had not succumbed to despair. Burundi's political parties had reached an Agreement in September to establish legal mechanisms and State bodies. The formation of a coalition Government allowed for the re-establishment of security and confidence and promoted the return of refugees.

The United Nations and the Organization of African Unity (OAU) had played a decisive role in the settlement of differences, he said. However, Burundi's political problems could only be solved in the sub-regional context. He hoped that those guilty of massacres in Rwanda would be brought to justice, and encouraged the Rwandese Government to pursue a policy of reconciliation and to ensure the return of all refugees. The Rwandese crisis had had regrettable consequences for its neighbours, including Burundi, which had ethnic, linguistic and cultural similarities with Rwanda. He proposed the convening of an international conference on peace, stability and development in the area of the African Great Lakes. It was necessary to deal with the refugee problem, and to establish mechanisms to promote stability and social and economic development.

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Eugene Pursoo of Grenada expressed support for the action taken by the United States and the multinational force in Haiti. The illegal seizure of power by the military had been ended, diplomacy had prevailed and further bloodshed had been averted. He noted that Grenada had implemented a structural adjustment programme to correct fiscal imbalances and promote sustained growth. Some success had been achieved; fiscal deficits had been reduced and the World Bank had restored the country's credit rating. However, targets for gross domestic product (GDP) growth had not been met. Over the next two years, emphasis would be placed on achieving a reasonable rate of growth.

The United Nations Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States and its programme of action had underscored the urgent need for international cooperation and assistance, he said. Grenada looked forward to the fulfilment of obligations assumed by the developed countries at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). However, environmental causes should not be used to prevent developing countries from gaining access to the markets of the developed economies. He went on to say that protection of the rights of children required greater attention. Emphasis should continue to be placed on the pivotal role of the family in national and global development.

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Said Mohamed Sagaf, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Comoros, told the General Assembly yesterday that Africa's destitution was a

permanent threat to the entire international community. The international economic situation did not allow any hope for the continent, but political stability required economic growth. Developing countries were bearing the brunt of a deteriorating world trade situation and were experiencing a net outflow of capital and a crushing debt burden. The gap between the developed and developing countries reduced the effect of economic recovery in the former. He stressed that cooperation between North and South was vital for global economic growth. Meanwhile, developing countries must cooperate on a regional basis.

Comoros had worked for a democratic and open society in order to bring about economic recovery, he said. A new Constitution had been promulgated last December and a new Parliament had been elected. Comoros had also signed a programme of structural adjustment, but effective international support was needed for economic recovery. He went on to endorse the General Assembly decision on the Comorian island of Mayotte. The Comorian authorities had always been willing to negotiate with France for the return of the island, but France had always opposed dialogue. France was prolonging its administrative presence there and trying to separate four islands that belonged together. For Comoros, the matter was of sovereign importance.

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Swedish Foreign Minister Lena Hjelm-Wallén yesterday told the General Assembly that the situation in Rwanda highlighted the need for preventive diplomacy, early action and coordination of United Nations efforts. The break-up of society in Somalia and the ensuing violence highlighted the need for careful coordination of peace-keeping, peacemaking and peace-building efforts. The Organization should take enforcement action only as a last resort and with a clear Security Council mandate. Efforts to end the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina should be intensified, with increased pressure on the Bosnian Serbs. She expressed concern about the reported Iraqi military activity near the Kuwaiti border, and support for the Security Council statement on the situation.

The issue of enlargement of the Security Council and the need to make its work more transparent required urgent attention, she continued. Stressing the importance of early warning and early action in conflict resolution, she said Sweden was ready to establish a peace-keeping brigade, in response to the Secretary-General's proposal for stand-by forces. Her country's development cooperation would focus on support for the sustainable development of poor countries, with special emphasis on democracy, popular participation and the rights of women. Sweden would continue to allocate a substantial amount of assistance to the operational activities of the United Nations and would continue efforts to strengthen the Organization's role as a forum for discussion and action and as a channel for development cooperation.

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Prime Minister Ntsu Mokhehle of Lesotho said that while the United Nations might not have the ability to predict events, it should have the

capacity to respond rapidly and effectively to crisis situations. The world community's apparent inability to react decisively to such situations in Africa showed that the continent could not continue to delegate its responsibility to the rest of the world. He noted that the Organization of African Unity (OAU) had established a mechanism for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts. However, Africa would continue to count on international solidarity and cooperation in the mechanism's trial stages.

On 17 August, he continued, the people of Lesotho had been told that certain clauses of the country's Constitution had been suspended and, as a result of that illegal and arbitrary act, that the democratically elected Parliament and Government of Lesotho had purportedly been dissolved. Despite the repressive measures taken by those who had intruded upon constitutional order, the people had risen up in support of democracy. He thanked the United Nations and the OAU for supporting his Government and the people of Lesotho in the struggle to maintain democratic rule. Through the mediation efforts of the Presidents of Zimbabwe, South Africa and Botswana, Lesotho had survived the unfortunate constitutional crisis.

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Zimbabwe's Foreign Minister, Nathan Shamuyarira, said that while the triumph of democracy in South Africa was a cause for celebration, other crises in Africa continued to be of major concern. If the Angolan peace accord were not signed by the end of October, the Security Council should immediately impose economic sanctions on the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). Somalia should take full advantage of United Nations peace-keeping efforts and Organization of African Unity (OAU) mediation to forge a political settlement based on power-sharing. Meanwhile, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) should be strengthened to assure displaced persons that they could safely return home.

International effforts to promote peace, stability and security could be largely facilitated through regional organizations, he continued. Consistent with the OAU mechanism for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) had given Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe the task of undertaking an initiative to resolve the recent crisis in Lesotho. That initiative had led to the restoration of constitutional order there. Similar arrangements could also be used to address the situations in Rwanda, Burundi and Somalia. However, the United Nations and regional organizations must provide financial and material assistance to sustain them.

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Carlos Morales-Troncoso, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the Dominican Republic, said the world was marked by economic globalization, tension between nations, and ethnic and religious conflicts. The use of force to resolve situations was no longer appropriate. The international community should examine how to achieve and strengthen democracy in order to deal with hunger, drug trafficking, forced migration and trade protectionism, which

undermined development. States were economically interdependent, and developed countries needed the markets of developing countries. However, the world was witnessing a resurgence of neo-protectionism. While tariffs were being dismantled, environmental, social and customs barriers were being raised.

Development policies must promote modernization of production and infrastructure, which required new technology, he continued. Social development was also needed, as health education and housing brought economic gains. The world was already threatened by environmental degradation, and must not be overburdened in the process of development. He went on to say that Haiti -- the poorest nation in the hemisphere -- needed international assistance and cooperation to promote peace and development. He expressed concern at the proposed merger of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) -- which was headquartered in the Dominican Republic -- and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

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Foreign Minister Bolong Sonko of Gambia said that abuses of political power and public office and serious corruption had necessitated the removal of the former Gambian government and its replacement by the Armed Forces Provisional Ruling Council. That action was politically necessary for the establishment of an equitable democratic political system. The new Government would set up institutions that would provide the necessary checks and balances to enhance the democratic process. He noted that his country subscribed to several international human rights instruments and would continue to respect its obligations under them. The Government was committed to returning the country to civilian control after addressing its fundamental weaknesses.

He expressed hope that the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) would encourage the Liberian factions to disarm without delay. International assistance would continue to be needed to restore peace, stability, law and order in Rwanda and to ensure the return of refugees and displaced persons. The international community's failure to broker peace and reconciliation in Somalia should not deter further efforts in that regard. He stressed that now was not the time withdraw the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II).

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Philip Muller, Foreign Minister of the Marshall Islands, welcomed the General Assembly's recent adoption of the agreement on the implementation of Part XI of the Law of the Sea Convention regarding deep seabed mining. That action would help bring order to the exploitation of marine resources. The United Nations Conference on Straddling and Highly Migratory Fish Stocks was also important as it promoted the responsible use of marine resources. Marshall Islands had to ensure the sustainable exploitation of its fisheries resources, within or without its exclusive economic zone.

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He went on to say that dangerous residual radioactive contaminants from the United States nuclear-testing programme remained a problem for his country. Sixty-seven bombs had been detonated, but the full extent of the resulting contamination had not been disclosed by the United States during the negotiation of the Compact of Free Association. The cleanup and disposal of nuclear contamination would be very costly, and the party responsible for it should provide the necessary funds and technical assistance. An international facility on a remote, uninhabited atoll of Marshall Islands could be used for the safe, permanent disposal of a portion of the world's dangerous nuclear material. His Government had resolved to conduct a preliminary feasibility study for such a facility and to consult closely with interested members of the international community.

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Adamou Seydou of Niger yesterday welcomed the conclusion of the Convention on Desertification, and urged all Member States to sign it. As a developing country, Niger was facing many economic difficulties. Variations in rainfall were a serious problem; there had been insufficient rainfall last year, but too much this year. His country had launched a major project to erect a dam at Kandadji on the Niger River -- the first of its kind -- so as not to be at the mercy of the weather. That project required international support. Following negotiations at Ouagadougou in Burkina Faso, his Government had signed a Peace Agreement with the rebel army in northern Niger, which envisioned a cease-fire and a normalization of the situation in the region. That Agreement had just come into force, and Niger was looking forward to national reconciliation.

He expressed concern about the accumulation and development of arms. As a producer of uranium, Niger had ratified the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and supported its universal extension. If the resources spent on peace-keeping were allotted to development, much good could be accomplished. He went on to say that Africa's economic prospects remained bleak. Debt prevented Niger and other developing countries from building an economic foundation. Cancellation of debt would lead to progress in development. The developing countries also needed a true development fund.

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Legwaila Joseph Legwaila of Botswana said that while he could understand the international community's frustration with the situation in Somalia, it would be unthinkable for the United Nations to simply abandon the country. The decision to withdraw the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II) must be carefully weighed against the consequences of the vacuum it would create. He warned that the Economic Community of West African States' Monitoring Observer Group (ECOMOG) might soon run out of the means and the will to persist in the seemingly impossible task of saving Liberia from itself.

In the past two decades, Botswana had experienced unprecedented economic growth and had become Africa's success story, he continued. That success was the result of a stable democratic political system and a free market economy.

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As Africa engaged in economic and political reforms, the support and cooperation of the donor community and the multilateral financial institutions was needed. Regrettably, structural adjustment programmes had often worsened conditions for the poor in the short-term. He was encouraged by the ongoing process of reform and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic and social fields.

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The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) today cancelled 21 flights into Sarajevo after the airport there was hit by two mortar rounds yesterday, according to a spokesman for the Organization. In addition, United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) planes were hit by small-arms fire yesterday and again today. The UNHCR said it hoped to resume flights into the city tomorrow if the situation stabilized.

Meanwhile, the Bosnian Serbs authorized six ground convoys destined for different parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, they refused permission for another nine, giving various "bureaucratic" reasons, the spokesman said.

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